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Abstract

Previous research investigating the effect of delay type generates mixed results. To bridge this gap, this study maps two competing theories, field theory and expectancy model, on to regulatory focus and examines the joint effect of regulatory focus and delay type on consumers' reactions to a service delay. We argue that the field theory is more suitable for predicting promotion-focused consumers' responses whereas the expectancy model is more suitable for explaining prevention-focused customers' responses. The results lend support to our arguments and suggest that promotion-focused consumers generate more intense negative emotions and lower service quality evaluations after a pre-process delay than after an in-process delay. On the contrary, prevention-focused consumers generate more intense negative emotions and lower service quality evaluations after an in-process delay than after a pre-process delay.

Key Words: regulatory focus; delay type; field theory; expectancy model; affective response; service quality.

1. Introduction

The study of imposed delay and waiting is highly relevant to the service industry. Unlike consumer goods that are usually produced in factories and stored in warehouses before they are delivered for sale, services cannot be inventoried (Dube'-Rioux, Schmitt and Leclerc, 1989). Service encounters extend over time and in most cases, the benefits are delivered and consumed during the service process. Thus, although a delay can be annoying and frustrating, in some service situations an imposed delay seems to be almost unavoidable. For example, the productivity of a

restaurant kitchen is almost fixed, but consumers may arrive at the restaurant in a less predictable fashion, or some consumers may encroach upon the service time of others; thus, waiting and delays are common and hard to manage (Dube´-Rioux et al. 1989).

The previous literature regarding delay and waiting time is extensive. In his review paper on the topic of waiting, Durrande-Moreau (1999) identified two groups of factors that have been studied: situational factors and individual factors. According to Durrande-Moreau (1999), most studies have focused on situational factors, such as music, visual aspects of the environment, and the design of the waiting location (Chebat, Gelinas-Chebat and Filiatrault, 1993; Chebat, Filiatrault and Gelinas-Chebat, 1995; Dube´, Chebat and Morin, 1995; Tansik and Routhieaus, 1999). However, the individual factors that have been explored, while theoretically interesting, had few managerial implications, as they often are not controllable in a real-world situation. For example, it's difficult for the manager to identify and react differently to customers who are in a good mood. At the end of his paper, Durrande-Moreau called for researchers to investigate additional contexts and subjects in an effort to generate more robust findings in this field. To that end, the present study will focus on regulatory focus, which is an individual level factor, and type of delay, which is a situational factor.

Regulatory focus theory proposes that people use different systems to regulate pains and pleasures (Higgins, 1996; 1998). People with a promotion focus are motivated to pay attention to positive outcomes: they try to maximize the presence of positive outcomes and minimize the absence of positive outcomes. Conversely, people

with prevention focus are motivated to focus on negative outcomes: they want to maximize the absence of negative outcomes and minimize the presence of negative outcomes (Zhao and Namasivayam, 2011). Although both systems are adaptive and all people possess both systems, different socialization experiences may make one system predominate. For example, Lee, Aaker and Gardner (2000) demonstrated that Western people tend to hold a more promotion-focused orientation, while Asian people are typically prevention-focused.

Dube'-Rioux et al. (1989) proposed three types of delay based on the stage of the service encounter: pre-process delay, in-process delay and post-process delay. A pre-process delay happens in the stage where preliminaries occur (e.g. checking in at a hotel front desk); an in-process delay happens in the stage where the main goal of the service encounters is achieved (e.g. having dinner at a restaurant); a post-process delay happens in the stage where activities necessary to the termination of the service encounter occur (e.g. waiting for the check-in luggage and leaving the airport).

Several scholars have examined the three types of delay in different service settings (Dube'-Rioux et al., 1989; Dube', Schmitt and Leclerc, 1991a; Dube, Schmitt and Leclerc, 1991b; Hui, Thakor and Gill, 1998); however, the results are mixed. Studies based on field theory (Lewin, 1943) predict that perceived waiting time should be longer, and affective responses should be more negative when a delay happens further from the goal achievement (pre-process stage) or after the goal achievement (post-process stage) than when it happens close to the goal achievement (in-process stage). On the other hand, studies based on expectancy model (Cahoon and Edmonds,

1980) suggest the opposite results, arguing that a delay occurring close to the goal state (in-process stage) should generate more negative reactions and lower service quality evaluation than a delay occurring further from the goal state (pre-process stage) or after the goal achievement (post-process stage).

The current article aims to develop an extended theoretical framework and reconcile the contradictory results from previous studies by mapping the two competing theories on to regulatory focus. Nowlis, Mandel and McCabe (2004) explored two utility dimensions of a consumption experience after an imposed delay: the positive utility of the pleasant event itself and the negative utility of the waiting period. Accordingly, we believe that the co-existence of both positive and negative outcomes during a delay warrants an investigation of how regulatory focus moderates the consumers' reactions to different types of delay. We propose that the positive utility dimension is more salient in predicting promotion-focused consumers' reactions to an imposed delay, whereas the negative utility dimension is more salient in predicting prevention-focused consumers' reactions to an imposed delay.

To recap, the main purpose of the current study is to examine the joint effects of regulatory focus and delay type on consumers' reactions to an imposed service delay.

2. Background Literature

2.1. Regulatory Focus and Delay

Previous studies suggest that a delay may either increase anxiety and stress

(Houston, Bettencourt, and Wenger, 1998; Osuna, 1985) or increase the positive effects of anticipating a pleasant experience (Caplin and Leahy, 2001; Loewenstein, 1987). Nowlis et al. (2004) conducted three experiments to test the two competing factors during an imposed delay. They provided empirical evidence that the utility of a consumption experience is composed of the utility of the event itself and the utility of the wait. During the delay, consumers may anticipate the future pleasant consumption experience and generate positive feelings; on the other hand, consumers may also find waiting itself to be frustrating and uncomfortable and elicit negative feelings. Nowlis et al. (2004) found that the degree to which one of these two factors exerts a greater weight than the other depends on characteristics of the decision task. For example, consumers who imagine consuming pleasant products enjoy them less after a wait whereas consumers who actually consume those products enjoy them more after a wait. In addition, for imagined consumption, the vividness of that product increases imagined consumption enjoyment after a wait. . In the present article, we contend that an individual's regulatory orientation may also influence his/her response after an imposed delay.

During an imposed delay, both a positive outcome (anticipation of the pleasant consumption experience) and a negative outcome (anxiety caused by wait) are present. According to Higgins (1996, 1998, 2002), people with a promotion orientation will focus on positive outcomes and they will treat positive outcomes as more important in their decision than negative outcomes. Conversely, people with a prevention orientation will focus on negative outcomes and they will treat negative outcomes as

more important in their decision than positive outcomes. Thus, when faced with an imposed delay that composes both positive and negative outcomes, people with a promotion orientation will mainly focus on the anticipation of pleasurable experience and weight it more heavily than the wait itself, thus generating more positive affective responses. On the other hand, people with a prevention orientation will focus on the negative feelings caused by the wait and perceive it as more important than the upcoming pleasant experience, thus generating more negative affective responses. In addition, previous studies suggest that the consumer's current mood state influences their service quality evaluations (Brunner-Sperdin, Peters and Strobl, 2011; Isen and Shalcker, 1982; Luong, 2007; Mattila and Enz, 2002; Taylor, 1994; White, 2006); thus, the affective response could bias the service quality evaluation in the same direction.

H 1a: People with a prevention focus will have more negative affective responses after an imposed delay than those with a promotion focus.

H 1b: People with a prevention focus will have lower service quality evaluations after an imposed delay than those with a promotion focus.

2.2. The moderating role of Delay Type

Dube'-Rioux et al. (1989) divided service encounters into three relatively distinct stages: A pre-process stage where preliminaries occur, such as waiting in a restaurant waiting area to get a table or checking into a hotel (Noone, Kimes, Mattila and Wirtz, 2009); an in-process stage where the main purpose of the service encounter

is accomplished, such as consuming food/drink in a restaurant or transacting business at a bank counter; and a post-process stage composed of activities necessary to the termination of the service encounter, such as paying the bill in a restaurant or checking out in a hotel (Hui et al., 1998). According to previous studies, a delay occurring in different stages may have a differential impact on customers' reactions (Dube'-Rioux et al., 1989; Dube' et al., 1991a; Dube' et al., 1991b; Hui et al., 1998; Noone et al. 2009). As introduced before, there are two competing theories, the field theory and the expectancy model, to explain the role of delay type on perceived waiting time, affective responses, and service quality evaluations. Both theories have received empirical support. For example, Dube'-Rioux et al. (1989), Dube' et al. (1991b) and Noone et al. (2009) support Lewin's field theory and suggest that people feel more irritated and give lower service quality evaluations after a pre-process or post-process delay than an in-process delay. Yet, Dube' et al. (1991a) found evidence for the expectancy model in terms of perceived waiting time estimation. To reconcile the conflicting results from previous studies, the present study maps these two competing theories on to regulatory focus theory (figure 1).

2.3. Field Theory and Promotion Focus

The field theory was developed in the socio-psychological literature as a means of explaining individual behavior, cognition and feelings in term of the psychological forces acting upon the individual at a given time. According to field theory, human behavior is determined by two regions of the individual's life space:

the individual's internal needs and the nature of the region/environment (Lewin, 1943).

There may be barriers in the life space that create resistance to goal achievement.

When an individual is further from the goal state, a considerable amount of psychological force pushes the individual forward and makes him/her anxious; however, when the individual is close to the goal state or in the goal region, the psychological forces have eased (Hui et al. 1998).

Based on Nowlis et al.'s (2004) two utility dimensions, the field theory focuses on the positive utility dimension during a delay - the anticipation of pleasant goal achievement. It measures the distance to the goal state (a pleasant outcome) and predicts the psychological reaction based on the strength of pleasant anticipation. Since people with a promotion orientation tend to focus on positive outcomes and treat such outcomes as more important in their decision, we expect that the field theory is more salient in predicting promotion-focused customers' responses after a delay than prevention-focused customers' responses. People with a promotion focus should feel more nervous during a pre-process delay than during an in-process delay because the former is further from the goal state, whereas the latter is already in the goal region. For example, customers with a promotion focus mainly center their attention on the anticipation of an enjoyment of delicious food; thus, they will feel more nervous when waiting in a restaurant's waiting area rather than when being seated at the table. The latter delay occurs after they have entered a goal region and consequently has a lesser impact on their reactions to the wait. .

H 2a: People with a promotion focus will have more negative affective responses after a pre-process delay than after an in-process delay.

H 2b: People with a promotion focus will have lower service quality evaluation after a pre-process delay than after an in-process delay.

2.4. Expectancy model and Prevention Focus

According to the expectancy model, one's attention to the passage of time is heightened when a delay occurs close to the goal state. The investment of time and effort typically increases during the process of goal attainment. Arkes and Blumer (1985) and Boltz (1993) showed that people's commitment to the successful achievement of a goal will escalate as a response to their previous investment (sunk cost). People who have invested more time and effort during the service encounter should show stronger commitment to the goal achievement. Thus, a delay occurring close to the goal state will generate stronger commitment and lead to more negative feelings (anxiety, stress) than a delay occurring further from the goal state (Hui et al. 1998).

Based on the two utility dimensions (Nowlis et al. 2004), the expectancy model focuses on the negative outcomes of a delay: the negative feelings caused by waiting. It measures the amount of effort and how much time an individual has already invested, and predicts more negative reactions with more investments. Since people with a prevention orientation usually focus on negative outcomes and treat such outcomes as more important in their decision, we propose that the expectancy

model is more suitable for explaining prevention-focused customers' responses to a service delay. People with a prevention orientation should respond in a more negative way during an in-process delay than during a pre-process delay. For example, the negative utility of the wait itself is salient in prevention-focused consumers' minds; thus, they will feel more nervous and irritated when they face a delay after they place an order than a delay that occurs prior to being seated because they have invested more time and effort in the former case. Hence, we put forth the following predictions:

H 3a: People with a prevention focus will have more negative affective responses after an in-process delay than after a pre-process delay.

H 3b: People with prevention focus will have lower service quality evaluations after an in-process delay than after a pre-process delay.

2.5. Regulatory Focus and Post-Process Delay

As discussed earlier, consumption goals are usually achieved by the end of in-process stage. For example, a customer expects to have a nice meal and his/her goal is achieved before the post-process stage (paying the bill and leaving the restaurant); a hotel customer wants to stay in the hotel for two nights and his/her goal is achieved before he checks out from the hotel. Since post-process delays occur after the goal attainment, the positive utility dimension during the post-process delay is absent and hence consumers mainly focus on the negative utility dimension during a

post-process delay. Therefore, we do not expect to see differences on the reactions across the two regulatory focus groups.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Design and Participants

A 2 (regulatory focus: promotion vs. prevention) x 3 (delay type: pre-process, in-process, and post-process) quasi-experimental design was used to test the hypotheses. In the current study, we measured regulatory focus using the Lockwood, Jordan and Kunda's (2002) scales. Previous studies demonstrate that East Asians tend to have a prevention focus whereas Westerners tend to have a promotion focus (Lee et al., 2000; Lockwood, Marshall and Sadler, 2005; Uskul, Sherman and Fitzgibbon, 2009). Therefore, we recruited participants from both the U.S. and China in order to insure that both regulatory focus orientations were represented in our sample. The survey instruments were translated into Chinese and back-translated into English by professionals. Our subject pool was composed of undergraduate students enrolled in a large state university in the Northeastern USA and a large university in China. This pool was deemed appropriate for two reasons. First, students are real-life consumers of restaurants, so they are familiar with our restaurant delay scenarios. Second, undergraduate students provide a homogeneous sample that is appropriate for theory testing (Calder, Phillips and Tybout, 1981; Lynch, 1982). Of the respondents (n=194), 53.6% (n=104) are Americans and 45.9% (n=89) are male. The age range is from 18 to 27. There were no significant differences between male and

female participants in any of the results reported below. Participants from both countries were randomly assigned to one of the three written scenarios describing a dining experience.

3.2. Scenario manipulations

In the scenario, subjects were asked to imagine that they decided to “*go out for dinner with their friends at a moderately priced restaurant that they have patronized before.*” A restaurant setting was selected because the service stages in a restaurant are relatively distinct and occur successively. Moreover, a common restaurant dining experience usually includes all three service stages (pre-process, in-process and post-process) (Dube'-Rioux et al. 1989). Three delay types, adapted from Dube'-Rioux et al.'s (1989) study, were manipulated and the total waiting time was held constant (30 minutes) across all the three scenarios. In the pre-process delay scenario, participants were told that: “*you arrived at the restaurant and expected to wait for about 10 minutes to get a table. After 10 minutes, the hostess informs you that your table won't be available for another 20 minutes. After 20 minutes, she returns to tell you that your table is ready.*” In the in-process delay scenario, participants were told that: “*you arrived at the restaurant and the hostess greets you. She walks you to your table and the waiter comes to take your order. Based on your past experience, you expect your first dish to be served within the next ten minutes, but after ten minutes you still have to wait. After another 20 minutes the waiter returns to serve the dish.*” In the post-process delay, the delay was manipulated as a 30 minutes wait to

pay the bill, participants were told that: “*Based on your past experience, you expect to receive the bill within the next ten minutes, but after ten minutes you still have to wait. After another 20 minutes the waiter returns with your bill.*” Please refer to the appendix for a sample scenario.

3.3. Measurements

The manipulation checks for scenario realism involved two 7-point Likert scales anchored at 1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree. For restaurant delay type, we asked participants to indicate what description best matched the scenario that they faced (please refer to the appendix).

Regulatory focus was measured using the regulatory focus scale developed by Lockwood et al. (2002) which consists of a prevention focus subscale (nine 7-point likert items) (e.g.: *In general, I am focused on preventing negative events in my life*) (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.88$) and a promotion focus subscale (nine 7-point items) (e.g.: *I typically focus on the success I hope to achieve in the future*) (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.91$).

This study assessed both positive and negative feelings. However, the positive affective responses were not included in the current investigations. Our results indicated that positive affective responses fell between the range of 1.5 to 2.0 on a 7-point scale and did not differ significantly across six groups. This may be due to the fact that the service failure scenario (30 minutes wait in a restaurant) put respondents in a negative mood. Andreassen (2000) argued that the initial condition of negative emotion is the denominator of service failure experiences and that negative emotions

usually outweigh the positive emotions (del Rio-Lanza, Vazquez-Casielles and Diaz-Martin, 2009). Moreover, we used written scenarios to describe the consumption experience. The written scenario enables the imagined consumption rather than the real consumption. As suggested by Nowlis et al. (2004), the level of pleasant enjoyment and positive emotions are lower in hypothetical consumption than in real consumption. Thus, using written scenario of imagined consumption in the current study could be another reason that the positive affective responses were relatively low and did not differ across groups. In fact, in the waiting time management contexts, other scholars also study only negative emotions (Dube' et al. 1991; Hui et al. 1998; Taylor, 1994).

The Negative affective responses were assessed by five items adapted from Dube' et al. (1991) and Hui et al. (1998). Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they were "irritated", "annoyed", "frustrated", "upset" and "angry" due to the delay (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$). The service quality evaluation was employed from Brady, Cronin and Brand's (2002) study and it was assessed by a five item (poor/excellent; inferior/superior; low quality/high quality; low standards/high standards; one of the best/ one of the worst), 7-point semantic differential scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.94$).

Previous studies have shown that East Asian consumers are more patient than Western consumers (Chen, NG and Rao, 2005), and hence we included the three item *Impatience Index* (Lee, 1992) as a covariate (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.71$). Demographics and frequency of dining were captured at the end of the questionnaire.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Manipulation Checks

Participants perceived the scenarios to be highly realistic as indicated by an average rating of 5.50 on a 7-point scale and there is no significant difference between two culture groups ($M=5.57$ for American sample, $M=5.43$ for Chinese sample; $t=1.18$, $p=0.24$). Two subjects failed to correctly report the service stage at which the delay happened and we thus excluded them from the analysis. Taken together, the results from these manipulation checks suggest that the manipulations were effective.

4.2. Results

4.2.1. Computing Regulatory Focus

To calculate participants' predominant chronic regulatory focus, we used a measure called "difference self-regulatory score" to represent the degree to which each respondent was more promotion-oriented or more prevention oriented (e.g. Appelt, Zou, Arora and Higgins, 2009; Cesario, Grant and Higgins, 2004; Higgins, Idson, Freitas, Spiegel and Molden, 2003; Lockwood, et al. 2002; Uskul et al., 2009). This measure was created by subtracting the promotion focus score from the prevention focus score. Therefore, respondents with positive difference scores endorse a stronger prevention regulatory focus, whereas respondents with negative difference scores endorse stronger promotion regulatory focus. We then performed a zero split on the difference self-regulatory score (Appelt et al. 2009). Participants whose

difference scores were greater than or equal to zero were assigned to the prevention focus groups (N= 106), while participants whose difference scores were less than zero were assigned to the promotion focus group(N=88). Following analyses are based on this zero-split on participants' difference self-regulatory score.¹

4.2.2. Hypotheses Testing

To test our hypotheses, we first used a MANCOVA with regulatory focus and delay type as independent variables and affective responses and service quality evaluation as dependent variables. Impatience was included as covariate. The MANCOVA, using Wilks' Lambda criterion as the test statistic, was selected because of the strong level of correlation between the affective response and service quality evaluation ($r = -0.463$). The MANCOVA results demonstrated that there was a statistically significant difference between the promotion focus group and prevention focus group on the combined dependent variable. (Wilks' Lambda = 0.924, $F = 7.683$, $p = 0.001$). More importantly, the regulatory focus x delay type interaction effects was significant (Wilk's Lambda = 0.80, $F = 11.09$, $p < 0.001$).

To test H1a, H2a and H3a, we performed an ANCOVA with regulatory focus and delay type as independent variables and affective responses as a dependent variable. Impatience was employed as covariate. The ANCOVA results demonstrated that the main effect of regulatory focus on affective response was insignificant ($F < 1$), while the regulatory focus x delay type interaction effect was significant ($F = 10.20$,

¹ We also did the median-split categories of predominant promotion focus or prevention focus. Analyses based on median-split yielded a similar pattern of results.

$p < 0.001$). The interaction effect is plotted in figure 1. Consistent with H2a and H3a, the three sets of planned comparison tests revealed that people with a promotion focus indicated significantly higher level of negative emotions after a pre-process delay ($M = 5.31$) than after an in-process delay ($M = 4.39$; $t = 3.62$, $p < 0.05$), whereas people with a prevention focus indicated significantly higher level of negative emotions after an in-process delay ($M = 5.24$) than after a pre-process delay ($M = 4.26$; $t = 2.93$, $p < 0.05$). As expected, people with a promotion focus ($M = 5.03$) and people with a prevention focus ($M = 4.81$; $t = 0.59$, $p = 0.56$) showed similar levels of negative emotions after a post-process delay.

To test H1b, H2b and H3b, we performed another ANCOVA with regulatory focus and delay type as independent variables and service quality evaluation as a dependent variable. Impatience was employed as covariate. The ANCOVA results demonstrated that the main effect of regulatory focus on affective response was significant ($F = 12.08$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that people with a prevention focus had lower service quality evaluations ($M = 3.59$) after an imposed delay than those with a promotion focus ($M = 4.12$). Moreover, the regulatory focus x delay type interaction effect was also significant ($F = 21.39$, $p < 0.001$) and is plotted in figure 2. The three sets of planned comparison tests suggested that people with a promotion focus rated the service quality significantly lower after a pre-process delay ($M = 3.81$) than after an in-process delay ($M = 4.94$; $t = 4.76$, $p < 0.05$), whereas people with a prevention focus rated the service quality significantly lower after an in-process delay ($M = 3.07$) than a pre-process delay ($M = 4.23$; $t = 4.40$, $p < 0.05$). These findings support H2b and H3b.

As expected, people with a promotion focus ($M = 3.64$) and people with a prevention focus ($M = 3.47$; $t = 0.91$, $p = 0.36$) had similar evaluation of service quality after a post-process delay.

5. Discussion

Imposed delays can be time-consuming, annoying and often generate negative emotions among consumers. Most research on the topic of waiting time management has focused on situational factors such as the servicescape (e.g.: music, aroma, decoration etc.) (Chebat et al., 1993; Dubé et al., 1995; Tansik and Routhieaus, 1996) and interventions (e.g.: providing explanation and estimated waiting time duration) (Butcher and Heffernan, 2006; Butcher and Kayani, 2008; Hui and Tse, 1996; Miller, Kahn and Luce, 2008). The current study introduced a new individual level factor- regulatory focus- to the waiting time literature. Nowlis et al. (2004) revealed two utility dimensions during an imposed delay: the positive utility of the pleasant event itself and the negative utility of the waiting period. Considering the co-existence of these outcomes, the current study extended the work of Nowlis et al. (2004) and examined the relationship between their findings and self-regulatory theory. Accordingly, we argued that prevention-focused consumers weigh the negative utility dimension more than the positive utility dimension, and consequently, they have lower service quality evaluation after a delay than promotion-focused consumers. However, we fail to support the H1a that people with a prevention focus have more negative affective response after an imposed delay than those with a promotion focus.

One potential explanation is that the majority of our participants in the prevention group are Chinese (90.9%). East Asians tend to inhibit their autonomous emotional reactions and disconnect their emotional expressions with their inner feelings (Kitayama, Mesquita and Karasawa, 2006; Markus and Kitayama, 1991) Thus, the insignificant result may be attributed to the different norms of emotional expression across the two cultures.

Furthermore, this study explored the joint effect of regulatory focus and delay type. Extant studies on different types of delay employed either the field theory or the anticipatory model and generated conflicting results. To the best of our knowledge, the current study is the first one to map the two competing theories on to regulatory focus and thereby reconciling the mixed findings. The field theory measures the distance to the goal achievement, and consequently, it focuses on the anticipation of a pleasurable consumption experience or the positive utility dimension (Nowlis et al. 2004). We thus contend that the field theory is more suitable in predicting promotion-focused consumers' responses to a service delay. The study results indicate that promotion-focused customers' generate more intense negative emotions and lower service quality evaluations after a pre-process delay than after an in-process delay, thus lending support to our argument. On the other hand, the expectancy model measures the amount of time and effort consumers have already invested, hence it mainly focuses on the passage of time during a delay or the negative utility dimension (Nowlis et al. 2004). We argue that the expectancy model is salient in predicting prevention-focus consumers' reactions to an imposed delay. Consistent with our

hypotheses, our results show that prevention-focused customers generate more intense negative emotions and lower service quality evaluations after an in-process delay than after a pre-process delay.

6. Implications

In addition to theoretical contributions, the current study has important implications for hospitality managers. For example, during peak dining hours, when the arrival of customers outpaces production capabilities, restaurant managers face a choice of asking consumers to wait in the waiting area or to wait at their tables. The results from the current study can help managers in making such decisions. Although regulatory focus is a personality trait, previous research has shown consistent culture-based differences. For example, Western consumers tend to hold a more promotion-focused orientation, while Asian consumers are typically prevention-focused (Lee et al. 2000; Lockwood et al. 2005). In fact, the data in the current study provide further support for this claim. Ninety-three percent of the American respondents had negative “difference self-regulatory scores” (promotion-focused) whereas 89% of the Chinese respondents had positive “difference self-regulatory scores” (prevention-focused) (Chi-square=128.34, $p<0.001$). Therefore, the results from the present study suggest that hospitality managers might react differently to imposed delays based on the customer’s cultural background. For example, if an imposed delay is unavoidable and the customers are of East-Asian origin, the manager should ask them to wait in a nice waiting area

(pre-process delay) rather having the wait occur while being seated at the table.

In addition, our findings may help hospitality managers to manipulate the environment to enhance either the positive utility dimension or to reduce the negative utility dimension. For example, for restaurants in Western countries, managers might use decorative pictures of delicious food in the waiting room, and use aromas of food to enhance consumers' anticipation of a pleasurable experience (Nowlis et al. 2004). Conversely, restaurant managers operating in East-Asian locations might be better off offering magazines and interesting TV shows or popular video clips to distract consumers from paying attention to the passage of time.

7. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations of this study must be recognized. First, the study was limited to a restaurant setting and these results may not be generalizable to other segments of the hospitality industry. Second, the delay type was manipulated via written scenarios. Consequently, perceived waiting time estimation couldn't be assessed in the current study. In addition, written scenarios enable an imagined consumption rather than a real consumption, thus positive affective responses couldn't be investigated in the current study. Alternative research methodologies such as a video manipulation or a field study could be conducted to test other dependent variables such as perceived waiting time and positive affective reactions.

In the present study, we didn't focus on the different operationalizations of post-process delay. In fact, some post-process stages can be treated as a pre-process

stage of the consumer's next goal achievement. For example, consumers may have a movie planned after dinner and they may perceive a post-process delay in the restaurant as a pre-process delay for the movie. Similarly, they may need to catch a plane after leaving the hotel, thus a post-process delay in the hotel means a pre-process delay for the flight. In other cases where no tangible benefit is provided during the service process, consumers may treat the end of service encounter as their goal achievement. For example, passengers may consider getting off the plane and leaving the airport as their goal state, rather than arriving at the destination airport. Moreover, consumers may not have a next goal in all situations. For example, in some cases, the only goal a customer wants to achieve is having a nice meal; she/he doesn't have any other plans after the dinner. In this situation, a post-process delay may lead to a retrospective effect- a situation where the consumer wants to savor the moment, thus resulting in positive feelings. Thus, further studies focused on different post-process delays may generate interesting findings.

Fig.1. Theoretical Framework

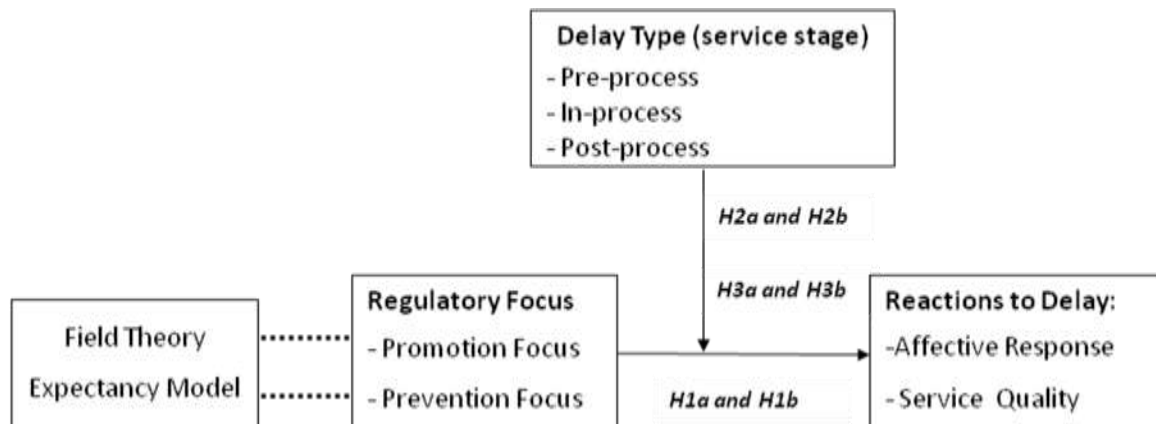


Fig.2. Interaction effect of regulatory focus and delay type on affective response

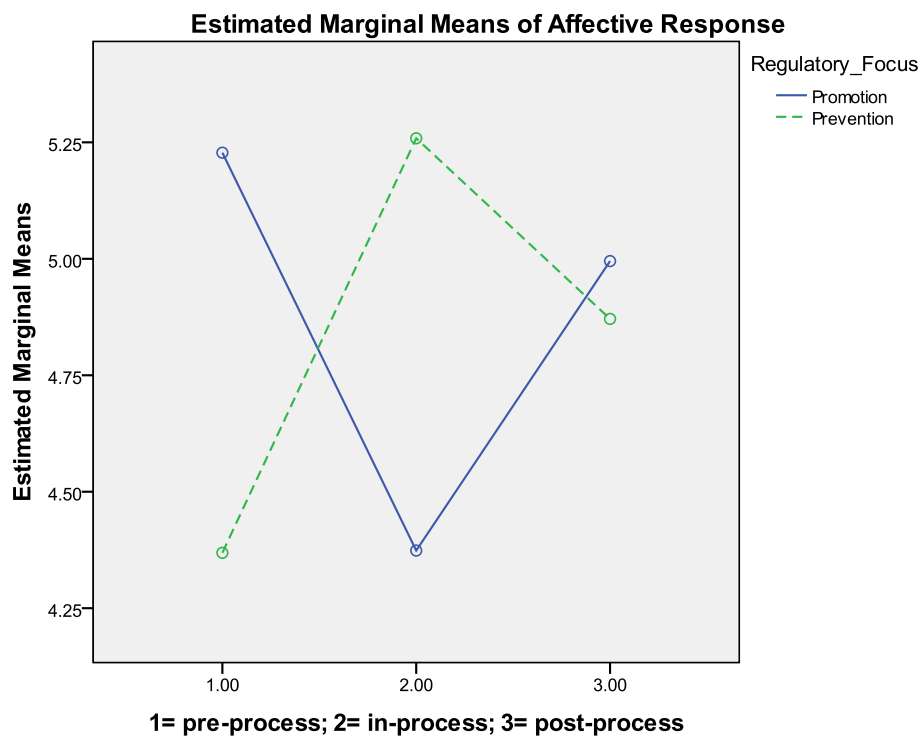
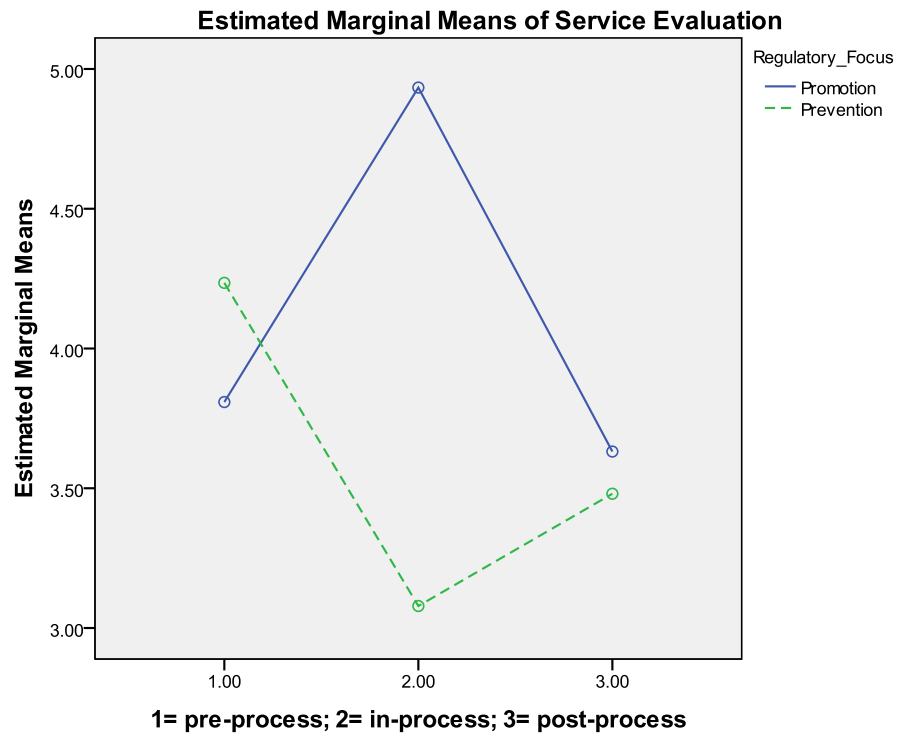


Fig.3. Interaction effect of regulatory focus and delay type on service quality evaluation



Appendix:

Example of pre-process restaurant delay scenario

You and your friend have decided to go out for dinner on Friday night. You have selected a moderately priced restaurant that you have patronized before. The food is great there. The restaurant doesn't take reservations. You arrive at the restaurant at 7pm. The hostess greets you and asks you to have a seat in a waiting area. Based on your past experience, you expect that you may have to wait for about ten minutes. After ten minutes the hostess returns and informs you that your table will not be available for another 30 minutes. After 30 minutes, she returns to tell you that your table is ready.

Manipulation Check:

Please check the one(s) that is(are) applicable to what you experienced in the scenario story:

The Delay in the scenario occurs:

- ☐ During the time between arriving at the restaurant and getting your table
- ☐ During the time between placing your order and finishing your meal
- ☐ During the time between getting your bill and leaving the restaurant